

Getting along without Perry

Marie Pace is a forensic scientist with the Mississippi Crime Lab's regional office in Meridian. She submitted this "Braving Rights" story about her husband, Staff Sgt. Perry Pace of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 185th Aviation Group, Company G, at Key Field.

Perry is a full-time Guardsman with 26 years of military experience. His civilian job is also with Company G, as a civil service employee doing aircraft maintenance on the CH-47 helicopters.

He deployed to Balad, Iraq, last year and was expected to return home late this month or early in March. Marie wrote this story in January.

By Marie Pace

special to The Star

As we go through life and relationships, we tend to take things and the people we love the most for granted. Sometimes it takes a separation like my husband and I have had to endure to make you realize just how special that person is.

Perry and I have been separated for a year now.

He was activated in January, 2004 and reported to Fort Benning, Ga., for his pre-mobilization. Then in March, he shipped out to Balad, Iraq.

I am so proud of Perry and the job he is doing serving our country, and I have come to appreciate him more and realize just how special he is as a friend, husband and father to our two children, Lindsey Jo, 20, and Lance, 15, during this time apart.

I have come to realize that I took for granted the little things Perry did to help out around the house — until it all fell on me to do. Taking off the garbage, helping out in the kitchen, putting on a load of laundry, keeping the dog fed, helping with homework, keeping the yard groomed, running errands, helping with the Christmas decorations, plumbing and electrical prob-

lems, etc. Just being my companion, someone to communicate with, watch a movie, go out to eat.

Update on the children

Perry and my son, Lance, are best friends and very much outdoors people. Lance loves to hunt, fish and play sports. With his dad gone, it has been a challenge trying to get Lance to everything he has been involved in — Civil Air Patrol, football, baseball, hunting (all year long ... if it can be hunted, he will hunt it) and fishing.

Thanks to good family support, especially Paw Paw Harrell Pace, Uncle Mike Pace and Uncle Charlie Roberts, Lance has been able to get his hunting and fishing in just as if his dad were here.

Several of Lance's close school buddies, Tyler Richardson, Jack Leeper, Josh Denning, Nathan Drummond, Dillion Morgan and Phillip Diveley, to name a few, have been awesome too.

Not only have they and their families helped out with Lance's extracurricular activities, but they have also helped me around the house.

Lindsey Jo has been in college pursuing an associate's degree in nursing while her dad has been away.

She has had a lot of family, friend and prayer support while accomplishing this degree, but she has been especially thankful for the words of encouragement she would receive from her dad via e-mail, instant message or telephone conversations when she felt down and discouraged.

Her dad wasn't able to attend her graduation, but she graduated on Dec. 18.

Several of Lindsey Jo's close friends have provided her with encouragement and support. I would especially like to thank Mrs. Sanders, Matt Brown, Jamie Rodgers, Misty Murray and other nursing school classmates for all their encouragement and support.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

FAMILY HUG

Marie and Perry Pace, center, are shown with their children, 20-year-old Lindsey Jo and 15-year-old Lance. Marie says living without Perry during his year-long deployment to Iraq has been hard: "I have come to realize that I took for granted the little things Perry did to help out around the house — until it all fell on me to do."

Staying in touch

Technology has advanced so much over the past years and it has helped Perry stay in contact with family on a regular basis.

We have mailed care packages to him about once a month, talked on the telephone two or three times a week, and sent e-mails and instant messages. This technology was not available in the 1970s when Perry was in the U.S. Marine Corps.

He was deployed several times out to sea (Persian Gulf, Pacific and Atlantic oceans) on an aircraft carrier six months at the time. He and I stayed in touch with letters, which would take three or four weeks to arrive. He could call home from different ports, but it was so expensive that we limited the phone calls.

Perry finally came home Nov. 19 for his two weeks of R&R and it was a fantastic reunion.

When we met him at the airport, he didn't let his feet hit the ladder coming off the airplane — he ran into the terminal to hugs and embraces from family members and boy did he look awesome! We celebrated the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays at the same time since he wouldn't be home for Christmas.

Short-timer

Perry is short-timing it now! His unit is expected to return to Mississippi anywhere from the middle to end of February.

I just want him to know how much I appreciate him and all he has done for this country. He has

kept such a positive attitude while away from home and I know that has been difficult. Being deployed, you are taken away from everything you are accustomed to. Sure, it has been difficult on me and the kids, as well as other family members, but we still have had some normalcy to our lives (our homes, cars, jobs, friends and family).

Honey, by the time this is printed in *The Meridian Star*, you will either be home or on your way home with Company G, 185th Aviation Group, and it will be such a time of celebration.

I would like to say thanks to my family, friends, co-workers and community for your continued support during this time of separation from Perry and your continued support of all Guardsmen who are serving our country so proudly.